

Proverbs, Part 4 9-5-21 Truth or Consequences

Today we begin with verses 17-22 which will introduce our theme for the morning. And rather than tell you what that theme is we will see if you are alert enough to figure it out from our opening text. Proverbs 12:17-22 *He who speaks truth tells what is right, But a false witness, deceit.* ¹⁸*There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.* ¹⁹*Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment.* ²⁰*Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but counselors of peace have joy.* ²¹*No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked are filled with trouble.* ²²*Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight.* So, what is our theme of the day? You can see that it has something to do with telling lies and speaking truth. Let's call it truth or consequences after the old TV show from the 60s. The passage here in Proverbs condemns lying and speaks in praise of truth-telling. It tells of how lying lips are a what? An abomination to the Lord. God detests lying. But he loves the truth and it says He will establish truthful lips forever.

Let's begin by looking at the sanctity of truth. The sanctity of truth. Maybe we should call it the value of truth. Behold the preciousness of truth and the hideousness of deceit. Consider three reasons why truth is such a big deal, why lying is so awful. Reason one is simply because God is called the God of truth. Lying is completely contrary to the holy character of God. The Holy Spirit is frequently referred to as the Spirit of truth. I John says that God cannot lie. This is part of the very nature of our Maker. And Jesus even said *I am the Way and the Truth*. When you oppose truth in any way you have positioned yourself against God. And when you position yourself against God, guess whose side you are on? Whereas God is called *Truth* and the *Spirit of truth*, the devil is called the deceiver and the father of lies. Responding to accusations from Jewish leaders, the Lord Jesus in John 8:44 *You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.* It is the lie that Satan used against Eve in the garden. The lie is his best weapon, dare I say, his only weapon. It expresses the very essence of who he is. There is a cosmic battle raging around us. It is the kingdom of God, called the kingdom of light, vs. the kingdom of Satan which is the kingdom of darkness. It is a battle for the allegiance of the human race and it is the war of truth against falsehood, God against the devil. And, my friend, every time you lie, no

matter how small the lie may seem, you cast your vote for the devil, the father of lies, and against the Lord who is truth. Few sins are as direct an assault upon the character of God as this one. It is anti-Christ. It strikes against the very nature of God. And...it provokes His wrath. He calls lying an abomination in verse 22. The NIV says he detests lying lips. Either way it speaks of extreme hatred and displeasure. In Proverbs 6:16 *There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him.* And then you get the list of seven, two of which pertain to speaking lies. God hates 17a *Haughty eyes, a lying tongue.* 19a *A false witness who utters lies.* God absolutely hates lies; He tells us that with emphasis. The sin of deceit is anti-God and therefore completely out of bounds for one who is being renewed into the image of God.

The second reason why truth-telling is a big deal is because of how lies destroy other persons. Proverbs 22:1a *A good name is more desired than great riches.* A reputation as a man of integrity and responsibility is one of the most precious things you will ever have. But, it is so very easily stolen by a false witness, by one willing to spread lies. Benjamin Franklin said, *Glass, china and a reputation are easily cracked and never well-mended.* With the flash of your tongue or a quick social media post you can wipe out a good name which a man has spent years to establish. With hardly a thought, you can do more damage to someone than 100 thieves. This is why God includes in his big ten a prohibition against slander. One of the chief perpetrators of this mischief in our society is the media. Misrepresentations and half-truths are often set forth by the press and taken at face-value. But, we too participate in this kind of destruction when we pass on reports that may or may not be true. Someone comes to us and says, "Charlie did this!" And we listen, and go to one of our friends and say, "I can't believe what Charlie did!" We are guilty when we describe what someone did and only give one side of the picture, usually the side that makes us look best and the other guy look worst. Lies are insidious because they destroy reputations.

Secondly, lies are to be hated and truth to be loved because truth builds trust and lies destroy trust. Trust is the very bedrock of happy human relations. The foundation of any relationship, marital, contractual, spiritual is trust. Sometimes, when Beth and I talk about this with engaged couples I almost come out of my chair because I've seen how destructive, and how very difficult to repair is a breach of trust in a marriage. You cannot tell lies, even little ones, and expect or demand that you be trusted. No-no. Honesty is an essential of happy relationships. If I can't trust you or you can't trust me we will not enjoy each other. I remember when I was a

teenager, I was very close to my mother since it was just the two of us at home. About two months after I got my driver's license I got a speeding ticket. I didn't tell her about it, but she found out later and my mother never chewed me out before or since like she did on that occasion. Do you know why? It wasn't the ticket that bothered her so, it was my deception. I didn't come home that night and say, "*Hey, Mom I did not get a speeding ticket tonight.*" But in close relationships, silence becomes a form of lying, pretending that all was okay when it wasn't and my mom's fury taught me something. She saw that if she could not trust me that precious relationship we had would be destroyed; and she was right. Beth and I wanted to be able to trust our kids as they were growing up and so we labored to teach them that deceitfulness is very serious and the most severe discipline our kids received when they were little were at times when we caught them in a lie. The oneness God gives us in his family is a precious thing. Don't ruin it with lies. Preserve it by speaking the truth in love.

Well, let's look at a third reason lies are so awful. First, they oppose God. Secondly, they injure others. Thirdly, they are against yourself. Lies complicate life and then you face judgment. The person who lies thinks he is doing himself a favor by lying but the Lord tells us that quite the opposite is true. Proverbs 11:3 *The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.* Proverbs 12:13a (NLT) *The wicked are trapped by their own words.* You know what that is like don't you? Haven't you ever been caught in a lie? You lied in order to obtain some advantage but it backfired on you? Those can be awful experiences. There is nothing more embarrassing than to be caught in a bold-faced lie. I heard about a butcher who only had one chicken in stock when a woman came in and asked for a chicken. He weighed it and said, "She's a beauty. That'll be \$5.25." "Oh, that's not quite large enough," said the customer, "Don't you have any bigger ones?" The butcher took the chicken back to the icebox, rolled it in ice several times, brought it back out and with his thumb on the scale said, "This one is \$6.00." The lady said, "Oh that's fine, I'll take both of them." Trapped by his own deception. That kind of thing is not rare in the least. Your lies can leave you standing red-faced before men. Even before you are caught, your lies make you nervous and timid as you wonder if you will be discovered. But what is more important to realize is that your lies will leave you standing red-faced, naked and ashamed before God someday. You might be clever enough to get away with a ton of lies in this life but you are not fooling God. Proverbs 19:5 *A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape.* You are getting away with

nothing when you lie, and furthermore ,you are heaping misery on your own head. Oh there is the temporary benefit! Lying can give you some sweetness, very short-term, but there will be big-time regret. In the book of Revelation I've noticed that liars hold an especially high-profile position. But, it is not the kind of high-profile you want. Revelation 21:8 *The cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.* Speaking of the eternal city, the apostle writes in 27 *nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.* 22:15 *Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.* Man oh man, you talk about truth or consequences. Hell is the eternal home of those who love and practice lying. You wouldn't tell a lie if you knew you were going to get found out would you? God's word says you will be found out, often in this life, always at judgment Proverbs19:5 *A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape.* Because that is so and that is sure, the sin of deceit is anti-self. It is the way of the fool.

There you have three biblical reasons for being truth speakers. Three are enough to raise the question. If lying is so damaging to relationships and so grievous to God and so hurtful, even to ourselves, why do we find ourselves doing it? Here we look at the temptation to lie. Why do we lie when we know it is wrong? Simple. Lies come in handy. Someone said, "A lie is an abomination to God and a very present help in time of trouble." Lies, seemingly, can do us a great deal of good. The first of our three reasons for lying is that we lie in order to look good and avoid looking bad. This may be the biggest reason for most of us. Our arrogance makes us lie. We want to be liked, accepted, get our own way, exalt ourselves, defend our opinions, cover our tracks - so we lie. We exaggerate our successes, understate our failures, we falsely deny blame and take credit. I loved this little cartoon in *The Family Circus*. Mom says: *Didn't you hear me calling you?* Her little son says, *Only the third time.* Most parents know when a child is lying, even without that much help. It's a bit harder among adults. When something goes wrong at work and the boss says, "Who did this?" Everyone says "Not me." In the same cartoon *The Family Circus* they sometimes brought out this character called "Not-me" who is a little ghost that gets blamed for everything. Who got the sink dirty? *Not me.* Who let the dog out? *Not me.* He is a creation of dishonesty which is promoted by pride. We want so much to be admired by others that we lie! It goes

back to fearing man more than God. It is a terrible thing. This is what motivated Ananias to lie in Acts. He was trying to look good before his Christian buddies so he lied about his giving. Peter wanted to look good before his non-Christian peers so he lied about knowing Jesus. You misrepresent what you have done and who you are because you crave approval and praise of men and it leads you to be rejected by God.

The second reason why we sin this way is to get something we want. We are motivated to lie by our lusts. You want more money so you lie about the condition of the car you are selling. You lie on your income tax form. Oh no, I know you don't do these things. I'm just saying that for the sinners in our online audience. A little boy and his parents were getting tickets from an airline agent. The little boy who looked to be around five told the ticket agent that he was only three years old. The agent looked at him sternly and said, "Young man do you know what happens to little boys who lie?" The kid said, "Yes, sir, they get to ride for half-price." Have you ever felt that temptation to fudge on the truth a little to save some money? Right after our daughter Sarah had turned 3, our family went to Disney world. At that time, the difference in cost between a 2-yr-old and a 3-yr-old was around \$30. Sarah still looked and even acted like a 2-year-old. No one had ever checked on her age before and I'm sure no one would have this time. I bet there were plenty of other 3-year-olds getting in free that day. What difference would \$30 make to a big outfit like Disney? But the rules said she had to pay. What do you do in a situation like that? Make a deal with God that you will give half the savings to the church? 90% of the savings to the church? Or do you do what is honest and pay the price? I'm pleased to say that we paid the price. I'm not pleased to tell you that we faced a similar situation at the Outback Steakhouse years later and did not do so well. This time Sarah had just turned 12. The Outback had some good kids' meals for \$2.50 but the menu said they were for kids under 12. Not 12 and under. Under 12. Sarah did not qualify. I knew that, but I ordered her the kid's meal anyway. Bad decision! Proverbs 19:1 says it's better to be a poor man with integrity than a rich liar.

You can easily see why a lie would be attractive, can't you? These are what lead us to lie: our lusts, and our pride. There is yet another reason we are tempted to lie. We live in a lying society. We see people all around us lying and it makes us feel disadvantaged that we cannot. It isn't fair! It really isn't. The world has a powerful weapon at their disposal that we are not allowed to pick up. The world basically says that deception is okay if you can get away with it. It's hard to be people of integrity in a world like this. Newsweek recently reported about the

epidemic of cheating on college campuses. A frequent scenario is this: The American young person who values career success above all else struggles valiantly to the top by lying on his loan application form. He then manages to graduate by cheating on his tests and papers. When he gets out of school, he becomes a crooked businessman who never pays back his college loan, cheats on his taxes, and his spouse and his partner. Do you know that 60% of government sponsored college loans are not paid back? That is our world. Closer to home there is the problem of church members who say, "Yea, I'll do that, I'll be there" and don't come through. Christians may not be lying about the big things as often as others but we don't seem to be committed to saying only what is true and doing precisely what we say. So, feeling strongly about our need for growth in this area I move on to point #4 which is the applications. Three things to do to display more integrity and honesty.

First of all, let's hate this sin of deceit. I say that a lot don't I? We need to hate this sin and that. I believe it is true and I believe that certain sins are so attractive that if you don't hate them you will never stop them. You gotta hate lying. God hates it. 12:22a *Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.* He hates a lying tongue and one who utters lies. God hates it and I want to hate anything God hates. Think about what we have seen -- that lying is anti-God, anti-others, anti-self. We get very angry when we are lied to. Don't you? Don't you hate being deceived? We don't like being deceived, but you know, I don't think there is any area of ethics where we hold a more blatant double standard. It is wrong for them to deceive us but it's okay for us to deceive them. We have to hate this sin in others and especially in ourselves.

Secondly, let's be more careful about what we say. It is vital to think before you speak. And, when you do think about what to say, the first thing you must consider is whether you are about to speak what is true. There are lots of lovely things written or spoken that are not true, but the first test of any statement is the truthfulness of it. I could get up here and tell you that when I was 18 God miraculously healed me of a fatal heart condition, delivered me from six demons and plucked me out of a life of crime and drugs. You may find all that highly encouraging, it may result in praise to God, and people may get saved because of it, but since it is not true God would hate it. Man, if I wasn't locked into telling the truth I could be a fantastic preacher. I could tell you some stories that would knock your socks off. Sometimes I wonder if I am extreme about this. I have been known to wrestle with the legitimacy of starting a letter "Dear So + so." Can I honestly call

the lady at the insurance company "Dear?." Everyone else seems so free about such statements. Computers all over America send out letters to "Dear Friend" or "Dear Occupant." God says we will give an account for every word. God says we are bound to do what we say we will. If you come to grips with that it will make you a heap more careful about what you say, if you understand that your words are your commitments. I know that certain personality types have more problems with this than others. Some of you are just very quick to speak like Peter who said to Jesus in Matthew 26:33 (NLT) *Peter declared, "Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you."* 35 *"Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You."* All the disciples said the same thing too. What Peter did and what we often do is commit ourselves verbally before we have counted the cost and before we have committed ourselves inwardly. So often we say we will do things without any real intention of doing what we say. "Oh I'll pray for you or I'll be there to help." Ecclesiastes says that it is better not to vow than to break your vow. Jesus says that for his disciples a simple yes or no should be as good as a vow. So let's be careful what we say. If you have to do what you say it is better not to say anything until you have reasonable confidence that you can do it. Wait before making commitments. When I do wedding ceremonies the part that always gets to me is when I say that, "by your words you will be bound for life. With a few words you will seal a commitment that will be lifelong." That is heavy. That is the way it is. So be more careful about what you say. That is application #2.

Thirdly, be more committed to what you said. More careful about what you say, more committed to what you said. Once you said it, whether you thought it thru before you did or not you are bound. You are bound biblically to perform your word. And that can be super, super tough. This applies to business contracts and to marriage contracts. You may have made a tragic mistake, but when you gave your word you bound yourself, and unless God releases you in some other way, you must do as you said for the Lord's sake. That is sometimes what it means to be a man or woman of integrity. Look with me at Psalm 15. This is one of those verses that my Father reminds me of time and time again. 1 O LORD, *who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?* Who is the righteous man who has favor with the Lord? 2-4b *He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart.* ³*He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend;* ⁴*in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD.* Now listen to this 4c *He*

swears to his own hurt and does not change. NIV says, “he keeps his oath even when it hurts.” That is the test of your commitment to being a person of integrity.

What does it mean to be a man or woman, boy or girl of integrity? It means that your word can be trusted. It means that you say what is true and you do as you say. You are a person whose word is your bond. There are two ways to violate God's call to integrity. One is by saying what you know is not true, the other is by not doing what you said, not keeping your word. In either case you are deceiving others, you are violating a trust. And the basic issue is can you be trusted to represent reality when you speak. When you say I'll be there at 4:00 what is your word worth? Can I count on you to be there? Some people you can count on not being there so little do they care about their word. And when you tell me, “Oh I'm late because my car wouldn't start.” should I believe that? You say, “Oh those are such little things.” Alright, they are little things, but where do you draw the line? Little lies are okay but big lies are awful? I don't see that in the word of God. What I do see is that truthfulness is our rule all the time. I need to be a man of my word whether I speak that word to the President or to my grand-daughter. The issue is still the same. And the basic question you must face today is whether your word is your bond. Little issues, big issues, can I believe what you say because I know you are a person of truth?

I would like to be able to trust you, to believe that you are a person of truth. But my life depends on someone else whom I know is the Man of Truth. I speak of Jesus who said that all who believe in Him will have their sins forgiven and inherit eternal life. All of us have lied. John said that if you claim you haven't you are lying. But Jesus faced all the temptations we face and never succumbed, never desecrated His Father's image, never sided with the enemy, never broke trust, never defiled his conscience. As we engage the Scripture and resolve to order our lives by them, let's confess too that we have blown it, that we are deceivers, and our only hope is to hide ourselves behind the One who is Truth incarnate. Proverbs 12:19 *Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment.* 19a *Truthful lips will be established forever.* Who has truthful lips? His name is Jesus. He is established forever, and so will you be, if you are in Him. Flee to Him today. Run to Jesus to be forgiven for all your deceits, all your infidelities, all your sins. And then, in the freedom and strength of His grace, commit yourself to be like Him, a man or woman, boy or girl of the truth.